STATE FUNDING SPOTLIGHT

Vermont Invests in Afterschool

Approximately $10 million

directed to afterschool programs annually from 6% state sales tax on cannabis

The Challenge

Data collected by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) highlighted the threat that substance misuse and suicide pose to Vermont's youth. As of 2016-2017, Vermont had the 18th highest rate of suicide in the nation and suicide was the second leading cause of death for teens. Opioid overdoses were nearly 1.5x the national average. The CDC's 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) highlighted the positive outcomes associated with afterschool participation, including decreased substance misuse and increased feelings of community belonging. Unfortunately, demand for afterschool outpaced the supply without local infrastructure or funding. As of the latest America After 3PM report, for every child enrolled in afterschool in 2014, three were waiting to get in.

The Opportunity

Vermont Afterschool, with the help of external lobbyists, leveraged the demonstrated connection between afterschool and positive youth outcomes to advocate for universal access to programming. The State Legislature recognized afterschool's vital potential for prevention in its $600,000 investment in Afterschool for All Grants, awarded between 2018-2020 from tobacco settlement funds. Vermont Afterschool, seeking a greater funding commitment, engaged in coalition building with the Marijuana Commission, Opioid Coordination Council, and Advisory Council on Child Poverty and Strengthening Families Council – each dedicated to fostering youth resilience and wellness. Vermont Afterschool also launched the Vermont Youth Project to amplify prevention efforts across the state.

Strategies

- Seek governor's support for afterschool
- Frame afterschool as the solution to state priorities
- Develop shared advocacy language when coalition building
- Prove impact with temporary funds to get traction for permanent investment

Timeline

- **2016-2017:** Concerning data captures high rates of substance misuse and suicide in Vermont. The positive outcomes of afterschool provide a vital counternarrative and avenue for youth wellness.
- **2018:** In a one-time appropriation, Vermont Legislature disburses $600,000 over three years in Afterschool for All Grants to increase access to afterschool programs as a tool of prevention and positive youth development.
- **2019:** Vermont Afterschool centers resilience and prevention in recommendations to state councils and in joint reports with the Marijuana Commission. The State Network launches the Vermont Youth Project to amplify prevention efforts and youth voices.
- **January 2020:** Governor Phil Scott announces a universal afterschool initiative as a part of his policy platform in his January State of the State address.
- **Late 2020:** In response to the Governor's call for universal afterschool, Act 154 creates the Task Force for Universal Afterschool to realize his vision. In parallel, Act 164 legalizes cannabis starting in 2022 with a 6% sales tax to fund afterschool and summer programs.
- **2021:** The Afterschool Task Force's first report recommends a structure for the cannabis-funded grant program. While waiting for legalization to begin in 2022, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds an initial attempt to scale afterschool access with the Summer Matters grants.
- **2021-2023:** To establish a cross-agency view of progress and strategy, the Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force is convened by executive order. With this new task force's support, ARP funds expand afterschool and summer programming across Vermont.
- **2023:** Act 78 formally creates the Universal Afterschool and Summer Special Fund to receive and disperse cannabis sales tax as grants to address the accessibility of quality afterschool in Vermont. The fund awards about $10 million in FY24.

In response, Governor Phil Scott announced in 2020 his intention to scale state funding to accommodate universal access to afterschool programs. To actualize the Governor's State of the State promises, the State Legislature created the Afterschool Task Force in Act 154. The legislation suggests that the Afterschool Task Force consider cannabis taxation as a revenue stream and Vermont Afterschool mobilizes allies to that end. Subsequently, the 2020 legalization of cannabis in Act 164 includes a provision to direct a 6% sales tax into afterschool programming.

The Result

As of 2020, the Legislature facilitated sustainable funding for afterschool with the forthcoming legalization of cannabis. The Task Force for Universal Afterschool, with input from Vermont Afterschool, collaborated to conceptualize a cannabis-funded grant program ahead of retail sale in 2022. In the meantime, Vermont worked to direct nearly $10 million from COVID-19 federal relief funds to afterschool programs to prove impact and begin scaling towards universal access. Proposal requests exceeded $25 million collectively, indicating unmet demand. According to the latest America After 3PM report, there were two children waiting for afterschool access for every child enrolled. The Governor issued Executive Order 08-21 to form the Interagency Afterschool Youth Task Force, responsible for facilitating the federal relief grant programs and advising on the creation of a new cannabis-funded grant program for afterschool. Finally, Act 78 established the Universal Afterschool and Summer Special Fund to disperse the state's cannabis sales tax in grants beginning in 2024. This dedicated funding stream characterizes afterschool as essential to positive youth development and prevention, necessitating universal access to quality afterschool. In FY24, the Afterschool and Summer Special Fund awarded $10 million in grants.

What's Next

Advocates are now working to:

- Address data capacity and bureaucratic challenges that come with scaling to universal afterschool
- Source other sustainable funding streams to supplement cannabis sales tax contribution
- Develop quality index to ensure that the state is guaranteeing not just access but quality enrichment through afterschool